

# *Okamoto Kanoko's Perception of War*

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**Abstract:** Okamoto kanoko (1889-1939) is a well-known female singer, novelist, and Buddhist researcher in modern Japan. Her active period in the literary world coincided with the time when Japan launched a foreign war. At that time, a large number of literature supporting war appeared in the Japanese literary world. Because Okamoto Kanoko did not mention “war” in her novels, she won the evaluation that Okamoto's literature is war-free, even though she created quite a few war-related literary works in her essays and short songs. The work is also considered to cater to the current situation, not its original intention. The discussion of Okamoto Kanoko's true attitude towards war is a subject in which there is still space in the study of war responsibility of Japanese female writers.

## 1. Introduction

Okamoto Kanoko's literature is full of transcendence, which blends with religious elements. They are extraordinary and refined literatures. Coupled with her extraordinary personality, it also leaves the writer with the impression that he doesn't care about society and politics. However, a series of essays on women and war published by the writer during the war expressed the attitude of actively supporting the war. The proposition of aggression can also be clearly seen in her literature praising the “imperial kingdom” and “imperial army”.

## 2. Okamoto Kanoko's Heart after the War

In the 1930s, in the midst of the reconfirmation of Japanese literature and the praise of war, Okamoto Kanoko, as an influential female writer and religious researcher at that time, published a series of literature about women and war. These works were either serialized in the Yomiuri Shimbun or published in volumes, which not only had an important impact on the Japanese people especially women at that time, but also showed Okamoto Kanoko 's understanding and attitude towards the war.

Okamoto Kanoko explained her stance on war as a woman in wartime in her essay “The Heart of Women after the War” (1937). She wrote as follows:

In the rear, it is better to say that women are the ones who are responsible. ...There are those who obey their own destiny and take the place of men on the battlefield to engage in labor work, while others obey fate and take good care of their families at home. It is this perseverance and calmness that gives rise to the realistic responsibility of guarding the country.<sup>[1]</sup>

Okamoto Kanoko realized that when men rushed to the battlefield in the age of war, women in the rear became the main force supporting and shouldering family and social responsibilities. This

is not only a factor that determines the stability of the family and society, but also a spiritual comfort to the soldiers ahead. In the era of the absence of men in society and the family, women become the main force in the rear. According to Okamoto Kanoko, “women are the ones with great responsibility” in the rear. Okamoto Kanoko's literature often incorporates the ideas of “fate” and “destiny”. Women must take the place of men to work and guard their families. It is regulated in the view of “destiny”, emphasizing that women must accept the responsibilities conferred by “destiny” and take pride in assuming responsibility. In this way, women willingly and uncomplainingly exert their “realistic responsibility”. Okamoto Kanoko's article skillfully connects “fate” and “responsibility” with the war, emphasizes that the “responsibility” of women in the rear is determined by “fate”, and calls on women to shoulder the responsibilities of the rear in wartime and play the role of supporting and assisting the war. This is undoubtedly Okamoto Kanoko's support for the war.

In the section “Post-Gun Care” of her essay “At This Momen” (1937), Okamoto expressed the concern and compassion of women as housewives for the lives of soldiers on the battlefield, and sympathized with the relevant reports at that time. She recorded:

Send addictions such as wine and yokan to the battlefield, and try to choose the things from the soldiers' hometown. The soldiers saw the familiar “famous wine” and “famous snacks” in their hometown, and the nourishment in their hearts can be imagined. This kind of care really reflects the love from mothers, wives, brothers and sisters.<sup>[2]</sup>

The article showed concern for soldiers on the battlefield, and it was also an expression of support for the war. The “mother, wife, brother and sister” in the back showed the love of the soldiers in the battlefield, but it is not stated in the article that the place of the “battlefield” is in China. In 1931, Japan launched the “The September 18th Incident”. In March 1932, Japan planned to establish a puppet regime of Manchukuo, and in 1937, taking the “July 7th incident” as an opportunity, Japan began its all-round aggression against China. “At This Moment” was written in 1937, at a time when Japan's foreign war was rampant. As an influential intellectual, he did not judge the brutal of the war. The care for the soldiers and the role of women in the rear as “mothers, wives, siblings” are all manifestations of supporting and assisting the war. Narita Ryuichi and Kawamura Minato pointed out in their research: “Women play the role of daughter, wife, mother-in-law, or lover in the face of war. Women look for their positions in these roles, and their positions are defined in advance.”<sup>[3]</sup> Okamoto Kanoko realized the rear role of women in wartime. Between the lines, it emphasizes the responsibility of women both in physical and in mental during the war, which clearly expresses the affirmation and support of women to the war. In her essay “The Language of Missing Our Soldiers” (1937), Okamoto Kanoko praised the Japanese soldiers on the battlefield of China as gods, and inspired the role of women in the rear:

When he became a soldier in battle, he felt that the Japanese man had become a god. The light of all bodies, now merged into one, makes people feel that they are marching forward in the field of the Tang Dynasty. ...Now, just because you are a female of our motherland, Japan, echoing the brilliance of your masculinity, the gentle and biting light shines on the land of the country after the war.<sup>[4]</sup>

Okamoto Kanaiko compares the soldiers marching on the battlefield of Tang dynasty to the “god”, and thousands of troops and horses become the “light of all bodies”. The deified “light of all bodies” “advanced solemnly in the wilderness of the Tang Dynasty”. The deified “Light of all bodies” marches forward in the fields of the Tang Dynasty, which shows the writer's respect for the soldiers and the affirmation of the war. The writer deified the Japanese army, saying that it was “advancing” “on the plains of Tang Dynasty”, which was obviously aggressive. Okamoto Kanoko once again called for women to play a role that help the soldiers, provide guarantee and support for the economic development and spiritual stability of the countries. However, there is no mention of

why the war broke out in the “Tang Dynasty”, nor the bloodshed and disaster that the war brought to the people of the “Tang Dynasty”.

From the above-mentioned literature on war by Okamoto Kanoko, we can see her affirmation and assistance to war. She emphasized that women not only take responsibility for the family and society on behalf of men, but also stress the importance of spiritual assistance for women. She requires women to rely on the “tenacity and composure” to boost their spirits and make men run to the battlefield with relief. As an influential female intellect at that time, Okamoto Kanaiko promoted the responsibilities of women in the rear and caring for war fighters during wartime, expressing the woman's concern of the “After the War”. Whether she chooses to propagate and support the national policy of war, whether it is out of “tactics” to cater or her true inner thoughts, her responsibility to support and support war is a fact.

### 3. The Aggressive Consciousness in the Thought of “Imperial Kingdom”

Okamoto Kanko's literature in support of the war is mainly reflected in the period from 1937 to 1939 when she traveled to Europe and got back Japan, and the node of the war was the July 7th incident. During this period, the expression of “Imperial Army” and “Imperial Kingdom” appeared frequently in Okamoto Kanoko literature, which clearly showed the attitude of praising the Emperor. She wrote in “The Incident and Women's Way” (1938):

Just as what we hoped, the imperial army defeated the Chinese army that disturbed the peace in Toyo and pacified the mainland. Just as the imperial army is marching forward, even if we are far apart, we cooperate with each other and advance together. The attack of the royal army is so fast that it seems that our dream will come true soon.<sup>[5]</sup>

The article stated that the “imperial army” defeated the “Chinese army” and “pacified the mainland” in China because China “disturbed the peace of the East.” The article avoided discussing the question of why the “imperial army” went to China to pacify the mainland, and why China would “disturb the peace of the East” on its own territory. What the author reveals in the article is the idea of sincerely shouting for the war. The words “Imperial Army” frequently appeared in the articles. In addition, Okamoto Kanoko also frequently used the terms “Imperial Kingdom” and “Imperial Army” in other articles. For example, she wrote in “The Incident in Autumn” (1938) : “We heard the news of the fierce battle of the imperial army, and the soldiers who missed their families on the expedition.<sup>[6]</sup> We feel sad when we think of this.” Another example is “thinking of the hardships of the imperial army’s battlefield”<sup>[7]</sup>, “planning the establishment of the imperial nation”<sup>[8]</sup>, which include “imperial army” and “imperial nation”. The term “Imperial State” first appeared in the instructions of the Army Ministry. At that time, Japanese Army Minister Araki Sadao (1877-1966) said: “The original meaning of the establishment of our army is the necessity of national defense in order to fulfill the mission of the imperial nation. It is also the necessity of the existence of the imperial army.”<sup>[9]</sup> In 1937, the Ministry of Education began to put forward the concept of “Imperial State”, using the term “Imperial State” extensively in “The Original Meaning of the State”. Hasegawa Ryoichi pointed out: “From the late 1930s to the early 1940s, the 'Imperial Kingdom' possessed the title of 'universal nation', which showed absolutely unique and played the role of unifying all of the nationals. However, the concept of the 'Imperial Kingdom' is still in the interior of the 'Greater Japan Empire' and lacks the legitimization of expanding to the outside area. ...For this reason, the concept of 'Hakkouichiu' was introduced”.<sup>[10]</sup> The usage of “Imperial State” in the modern Japanese diplomacy mainly refers to the period that during the Japanese war of aggression against China, “Imperial State' means the country ruled by Japan”.<sup>[11]</sup> The emperor’s country is the “imperial state” and the emperor’s army is the “imperial army”, it demonstrates the authority with the emperor as the apex of power, especially the unity of the consciousness of the

national community during the war. The “July 7th Incident” was an escalation of the Japanese war of aggression against China. The so-called “imperial army” in Okamoto's article “pacified the mainland” in China was actually a war of aggression launched by Japan. “The act of aggression is approved. Okamoto Kanoko avoided talking about the Japanese army's aggression in the territory of other countries. She blindly praised the “imperial army” and Japan's advancement of war in China, which shows that Okamoto Kanoko absorbed and recognized the idea of “imperial state”. It is also obvious that she supported the war with the ideology of the “Imperial State”.

Okamoto Kanoko praised the emperor, followed the will of the imperial state, and supported the war with the idea of “imperial state”. It is full of aggression. She wrote in the short song “The War Scenes” (1938):

Look! Only my imperial army marched into China's airspace and crossed the sky.

Look! Only my imperial army swept through Chinese territory, the wind and grass drifted.<sup>[12]</sup>

In addition to supporting the war launched by the emperor's army “Imperial Army” and boost a morale for them, her advocacy of aggression is clear. The thought of “Imperial Kingdom” introduced the concept of “Hakkouichiu” and constantly expanded to the outside world, which became the theoretical basis for Japan to expand its wars abroad. Niino Kazunobu pointed out: “The 'Way of mikado' was frequently used in the Kokutai Meicho Movement to the Sino-Japanese War, and the Sino-Japanese War was used as a concept of jihad.” The “Way of mikado” put a “holy war” on the war of foreign aggression”.<sup>[13]</sup> “Look”, “Look”, “Imperial Army advances into China's airspace,” “Imperial Army sweeps Chinese territory,” the unabashedly affirmative attitudes to war show that Okamoto Kanoko catered to the country's war policy, actively promoted the idea of “imperial state. “The idea of aggression is obvious.

#### 4. Conclusion

Okamoto Kanoko, who is both a writer and a religious person, has left a different impression of the world in her writing style and personality. Even though the writer wrote literature in support of the war during the Japanese war of aggression against China, it was tolerantly regarded as “acting skills” and “tactics adopted by Kanoko”.<sup>[14]</sup> However, from her series of essays on women and war, we can see the affirmation and support of women to the war. Frequent praises of the “Imperial State” and “Imperial Army” conveyed her sincere obedience to the Emperor and acceptance of the “Imperial State” ideology, and the aggressive consciousness in her thought of “imperial kingdom” is clear. Okamoto Kanoko supports and affirms that war is an unavoidable fact, and the acceptance and application of the idea of “imperial kingdom” also shows that the act of supporting war is not only “acting” and “tactics”.

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